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The subject of this article is the mantle of the kings of Sicily, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Made in Palermo in the 1130s, it is often known as the mantle of Roger II. Following his coronation in 1130, King Roger II saw the need to ensure the succession of his sons. As part of his strategy to consolidate dynastic succession, Roger invested his sons with important titles in the mainland regions of the kingdom. This article has two parts: the first part discusses the materials used to make the mantle, the journeys they took to reach Sicily and the diplomatic and commercial relationships necessary to acquire them. The second part argues that the mantle may have been made for the investiture ceremonies of the king's sons and examines how the materials and their exoticism shaped the ceremonial meaning of the garment.

Key words: textiles, Palermo, Sicily, investiture, silk, pearls, gold, Byzantine, Norman.

So many medieval textiles have arrived in the twenty-first century in fragments, often translucent, colours faded and edges frayed, demanding that we take imaginative leaps to see them as they once were. Rarely do we encounter a medieval garment in such good condition as the mantle of the kings of Sicily (figure 1). Even reproduced in poor-quality images it is arresting, surprising and impressive. In person, in its home in Vienna it elicits awe and wonder. The mantle is a semicircle of red silk, embroidered with gold thread, embellished with enamels, gemstones and thousands of pearls. These luxurious materials have been used to create an enigmatic imagery: in the centre of the semicircle is a palm tree, flanked by pairs of lions, standing on top of camels. An Arabic inscription along the curved edge tells us that it was made at the court of the Sicilian king, Roger II (r.1130 – 1154), in Palermo in the Islamic year 528, which is 1133-4 in the Western calendar:

“This was made in the most royal, flourishing wardrobe, with good fortune, magnificence, splendour, perfection, might, superiority, generosity, prosperity, propitious fate, dignity, glory, beauty, attainment of desires and hopes, pleasure of days and nights without end or removal, with power, declaration of faith, vigilance, protection, good fortune, security, victory and capability, in the city of

Sicily, in the year five-hundred and twenty-eight [1133–4 CE]”¹

The mantle is a familiar object for historians of medieval Sicily. Generally seen as an example of a visual repertoire that was shared across Mediterranean courts, the iconography has attracted more attention than any other aspect. Various interpretations of the relationship between the camel and lion have been proposed: some see a depiction of the heavens, most view the iconography as a comment on Roger’s kingship.² Most scholars have seen, in the placement of the animals, a discourse of dominance and submission: the lion representing the Christian king Roger, the camel his vanquished Muslim subjects, despite there being no evidence for camels as symbols of Islam or Muslims.³ More convincingly, William Tronzo views the lion and camel as symbols of noble and disgraced rulers respectively and incorporates the inscription into an interpretation in which the mantle legitimises Roger II’s rule by presenting his kingdom as a blessed place to live.⁴ The mantle has always been seen in the context of the royal court, often linked to the visual programme of the Cappella Palatina and the re-Arabisation which took place in the 1130s. Jeremy Johns has shown that the Arabic facet of Roger’s court was a coordinated and coherent aspect of court culture and places the mantle’s inscription within that.⁵ Most recently Isabelle Dolezalek, in her book, *Arabic Script on Christian Kings: Textile Inscriptions on Royal Garments from Norman Sicily*, has shifted the focus to the inscription and its place within a wider Islamic tradition of *tirāz*.⁶

¹ Jeremy Johns, ‘Arabic Inscriptions in the Cappella Palatina: Performativity, Audience, Legibility and Illegibility’, in *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World*, ed. Antony Eastmond (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 134.

² Oleg Grabar, ‘The Experience of Islamic Art’, in *The Experience of Islamic Art on the Margins of Islam*, ed. Irene A. Bierman (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2005), 36–38; Eva Rose F. Hoffman, ‘Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century’, *Art History* 24, no. 1 (February 2001): 27–43.

³ Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily: A Ruler Between East and West* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 124–25; Hoffman, ‘Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century’, 27–33; Dirk Booms and Peter Higgs, *Sicily: Conquest and Culture* (London: British Museum Press, 2016), 212–14.

⁴ William Tronzo, ‘The Mantle of Roger II of Sicily’, in *Robes and Honor - The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 241–53.

⁵ Jeremy Johns, ‘The Arabic Inscriptions of the Norman Kings of Sicily: A Reinterpretation’, in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane e Trame Di Seta Dal Palazzo Reale Di Palermo* (Catania: Giuseppe Maimone, 2006), 324–337.

⁶ Isabelle Dolezalek, *Arabic Script on Christian Kings: Textile Inscriptions on Royal Garments from Norman Sicily*. (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017).

In this article I want to look at the mantle from a different angle – or rather from two different, interrelated angles: materials and ceremonial function. In his analysis of the eleventh-century ‘Star Mantle’ of Emperor Henry II (d.1024), David Ganz describes what he calls the “performative context”, in which the meaning of the garment was activated, not through simply looking at it or reading the inscriptions but “through the ‘index’ of weaving, embroidering, gift-giving, robing and wearing.”⁷ In this article I will investigate how the meaning of the mantle was built up through the process of acquiring materials, trading, importing, collating, embroidering, robing, wearing and inheriting. How did the materials reach Sicily? How were they crafted? Where and when was the mantle worn? And what role did it play in the politics of King Roger’s early reign? Although the mantle is usually seen as an ‘Arabic’ object, rooted in the cultural re-Arabisation of Palermo, I want to explore the possibility that it may have been worn by the king and his sons on the southern Italian mainland and that the choice of materials and ceremonial function may be embedded in the relationship between the kingdom of Sicily and the Byzantine Empire.

Part One: Materials

The inscription tells us that the garment was created under the auspices of the king, in Palermo. The Arabic word for the place it was made is *khizāna*, which Isabelle Dolezalek translates as ‘treasury’ and Jeremy Johns as ‘wardrobe’.⁸ Either way, it was made in a workshop within the precincts of the royal palace. Oleg Grabar claims that it was made by women, but there is no evidence for that.⁹ The use of the Islamic dating system in the Arabic inscription suggests that the embroiderers may have been Arab Muslims.¹⁰ As Isabelle Dolezalek has demonstrated, the form of the inscription is unlike contemporary *ṭirāz* bands, such as those found on textiles produced at the Fatimid court in Cairo. Stylistically the mantle’s inscription is closest to epigraphy from Sicily and Ifriqiya.¹¹ The mantle is lined with four separate fabrics: a semi-circular lampas weave, which was added later in the Middle Ages and, along the straight edge, three fabrics which are thought to have been in place in the

⁷ David Ganz, ‘Pictorial Textiles and Their Performance: The Star Mantle of Henry II’, in *Dressing the Part: Textiles as Propaganda in the Middle Ages*, ed. Kate Dimitrova and Margaret Goehring (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 25–26.

⁸ Johns, ‘The Arabic Inscriptions of the Norman Kings of Sicily: A Reinterpretation’, 327; Dolezalek, *Arabic Script on Christian Kings*, 9.

⁹ Grabar, ‘The Experience of Islamic Art’, 41.

¹⁰ Isabelle Dolezalek, ‘Textile Connections? Two Ifriqiyān Church Treasuries in Norman Sicily and the Problem of Continuity across Political Change’, *Al-Masāq* 25, no. 1 (2013): 106, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09503110.2013.767009>.

¹¹ Dolezalek, 107.

1130s. They are known as the fabric of the birds, the fabric of the dragons, and the fabric of the tree of life.¹² All three are silk tapestries, interwoven with gold thread. Stylistically the three designs are similar and are derived from Coptic iconography, while the figures are dressed in a Byzantine manner.¹³ Two of these three pieces of fabric belong to a corpus of textiles thought to have been made in Palermo from the tenth century onwards (although some scholars have raised the possibility that some may have been produced in Spain).¹⁴ The third seems to have come from Khurasan in Central Asia.¹⁵ Dolezalek has suggested that the palace workshop had a stock of textiles, both old and new, which came from various sources (diplomatic gifts, treasuries of previous rulers, booty from war) and were drawn upon to provide a lining for the new mantle.¹⁶ Dolezalek tentatively reads the use of older fabrics in the lining, like the use of older epigraphic conventions in the inscription, as an “intentional display of political continuity with a legitimising function”.¹⁷

Alongside the pearls and gold thread embroidery, the mantle is decorated with enamel plaques and gemstones. The royal palace in Palermo had an enamel workshop in the twelfth century and the enamel plaques on the mantle were probably made there: other examples of enamels made in the royal workshop are the so-called *stauroteca* of Robert Guiscard (actually made in the twelfth century, long after Guiscard’s death); the so-called *stauroteca* of San Leonzio; and the plaque on the ciborium of the basilica of San Nicola in Bari, which depicts Roger II with St Nicholas.¹⁸

¹² Hofenk de Graaff and van Bommel, ‘Indagine Sulle Sostanze Coloranti’, 101; Grabar, ‘The Experience of Islamic Art’, 32; Dolezalek, ‘Textile Connections?’, 109–12; Cilgia Caratsch, ‘Fodera Del Manto Di Ruggero II’, in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane e Trame Di Seta Dal Palazzo Reale Di Palermo*, vol. 1, 2 vols (Catania: G. Maimone, 2006), 164–67.

¹³ Caratsch, ‘Fodera Del Manto Di Ruggero II’, 166–67.

¹⁴ Rosa Maria Martin I Ros, ‘Frammenti Con Uccelli Dell’Alba Dell’Abate Arnau Ramon Di Biure’, in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane e Trame Di Seta Dal Palazzo Reale Di Palermo*, vol. 1, 2 vols (Catania: G. Maimone, 2006), 172–73; Tiziana Giustozzi, ‘Frammento Con Figure Umane e Animali Vari’, in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane e Trame Di Seta Dal Palazzo Reale Di Palermo*, vol. 1, 2 vols (Catania: G. Maimone, 2006), 180–81; Tiziana Giustozzi, ‘Frammento Con Figure Umane e Animali Vari Della Casula Di S. Merry’, in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane e Trame Di Seta Dal Palazzo Reale Di Palermo*, vol. 1, 2 vols (Catania: G. Maimone, 2006), 184–85; Dolezalek, ‘Textile Connections?’, 109–11.

¹⁵ Giovanni Curatola, *Al-Fann. Arte Della Civiltà Islamica. La Collezione Al-Sabah, Kuwait* (Milan: Skira, 2010), 104–5, no. 76.

¹⁶ Dolezalek, ‘Textile Connections?’, 111.

¹⁷ Dolezalek, 111.

¹⁸ Maria Katja Guida, ‘Stauroteca Cosidetta Di S. Leonzio’, in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane e Trame Di Seta Dal Palazzo Reale Di Palermo*, vol. 1, 2 vols (Catania: G. Maimone, 2006), 223–25; Maria Venezia, ‘Stauroteca Cosidetta Di Roberto Il Guiscardo’, in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane e Trame Di Seta Dal Palazzo Reale Di Palermo*, vol. 1, 2 vols (Catania: G. Maimone, 2006), 219–21; Sofia Di Sciascio, ‘Placca Con S. Nicola Che Incorona Ruggero II’, in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane e Trame Di Seta Dal Palazzo Reale Di Palermo*, vol. 1, 2 vols (Catania: G. Maimone, 2006), 216–17.

The materials used in the mantle – silk, gold, pearls, enamels and gemstones - are among the most expensive and luxurious available in the Middle Ages. The silk, gold and pearls are very high quality and were all imported to Sicily. To a medieval audience it would have been very striking that the materials are exotic and expensive. Although the iconography was no doubt important, interesting and meaningful to its twelfth-century audience, the impact of the images would have been secondary to the impact of the materials themselves. When the mantle was worn, draped over the shoulders, the images and inscription were illegible, but the physicality and luminosity of the materials was enhanced by the movement of the wearer. Let us trace the journeys these materials took to Sicily, beginning with silk.

Silk

The mantle is made of samite, a type of silk cloth which is particularly strong, heavy and glossy.¹⁹ It is coloured with deep scarlet kermes dye.²⁰ Sericulture was practiced in southern Italy, during the pre-Norman period, but there is no evidence of a tradition of weaving high-quality silks. This very high-quality samite must have been imported.²¹ We will never know for sure where it came from but it is most likely to be of Byzantine origin (although Baghdad and Cairo have also been suggested as possibilities).²² Within the Byzantine Empire in the twelfth century, the two centres of samite production were Constantinople and Thebes.²³ David Jacoby and others are confident that the samite for the mantle was imported to Sicily from Thebes.²⁴ Indeed, silks from Thebes were highly valued in Sicily, so much so that Roger II later abducted silk workers from Thebes (this will be discussed in more detail below).

¹⁹ David Jacoby, 'Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 227, note 165, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3591386>.

²⁰ Susanne Biedermann et al., 'Analisi Techniche', in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane e Trame Di Seta Dal Palazzo Reale Di Palermo*, ed. Maria Andaloro, vol. 1, 2 vols (Catania: G. Maimone, 2006), 93–95; Judith H. Hofenk de Graaff and Maarten R. van Bommel, 'Indagine Sulle Sostanze Coloranti', in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane e Trame Di Seta Dal Palazzo Reale Di Palermo*, ed. Maria Andaloro, vol. 1, 2 vols (Catania: G. Maimone, 2006), 101–6.

²¹ David Jacoby, 'Silk in Western Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade', in *Trade, Commodities and Shipping in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Aldershot: Routledge, 1997), 119–22; Sarah Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met: Sicily in the Early Medieval Mediterranean* (Cornell University Press, 2017), 155–61.

²² Grabar, 'The Experience of Islamic Art', 31; Regula Schorta, *Monochrome Seidengewebe des hohen Mittelalters* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 2000), 142–44.

²³ Anna Muthesius, 'Textiles as Text', in *Wonderful Things: Byzantium Through Its Art*, ed. Liz James and Antony Eastmond (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 192.

²⁴ Jacoby, 'Silk in Western Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade', 462–64; Rotraud Bauer, 'Il Manto Di Ruggero II', in *I Normanni. Popolo d'Europa, 1030-1200*, ed. Mario D'Onofrio (Venice: Marsilio, 1994), 281–84; Mechthild Flury-Lemberg, *Textile Conservation and Research: A Documentation of the Textile Department on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Abegg Foundation* (Bern: Abegg-Stiftung, 1988), 200–201.

In early Byzantium the imperial authorities attempted to control the production and consumption of silk within the empire. Silk weaving was permitted only in imperial workshops and the wearing of silk garments was regulated (from 382, only members of the imperial family were permitted to wear gold embroidered silk garments).²⁵ Over the centuries, these prohibitions were eroded and by the twelfth century, a private silk industry had developed and some silks were legally exported to the west.²⁶ However, at the time the mantle was made, the Mediterranean trade in high-quality silk like samite from Constantinople and Thebes was still controlled by imperial oversight.²⁷ Byzantine silk was imported and sold in Italy by merchants from Venice, Amalfi, Gaeta, Bari and Genoa.²⁸ However, only the Venetians are recorded as trading specifically with Thebes: in 1171, Genoese merchants requested permission to be able to buy silk in Thebes, in order to compete with the Venetians.²⁹ For Italian merchants importing Byzantine silks was lucrative and trade relationships with Byzantine manufacturing centres were important to economic success. Importing silk required not just economic clout and mercantile infrastructure but also diplomatic ties with the Byzantine authorities, as the Genoese request of 1171 shows. Obtaining a high-quality piece of samite for a piece of regalia, was not just a demonstration of the king's wealth, but also of his international relationships and his reputation on the Mediterranean stage.

Pearls

Like silk, pearls had enormous value both as commodities and as diplomatic gifts. Some particularly large, high-quality pearls were so prized they were given names, such as Al-Yatima, 'the unique' and Al-Azima 'the enormous', which belonged to the Umayyads and

²⁵ Julia L. Galliker, 'Middle Byzantine Silk in Context: Integrating the Textual and Material Evidence' (University of Birmingham, 2014), 37.

²⁶ Angeliki E. Laiou and Cécile Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 84 and 89.

²⁷ Jacoby, 'Silk in Western Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade', 466–67, 488 and 490–92; David Jacoby, 'Silk Production', in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys, Robin Cormack, and John F. Haldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 422.

²⁸ David Jacoby, 'Genoa, Silk Trade and Silk Manufacture in the Mediterranean Region (1100-1300)', in *Commercial Exchange Across the Mediterranean: Byzantium, the Crusader Levant, Egypt and Italy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005), 12.

²⁹ David Jacoby, 'Byzantine Maritime Trade, 1025 - 1118', in *Autour Du Premier Humanisme Byzantin & Des Cinq Etudes Sur Le XIe Siècle, Quarante Ans Après Paul Lemerle*, ed. Bernard Flusin and Jean-Claude Cheynet (Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, 2017), 644; Jacoby, 'Silk in Western Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade', 464. Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 128.

was passed to the Abbasids.³⁰ Like silk, pearl fishing and trading was a complex, lucrative and highly-regulated industry. Where did the pearls on the Sicilian mantle come from and how were they obtained? They were certainly not obtained locally since there were no pearl fisheries in the Mediterranean.³¹ It was possible to obtain pearls in northern Europe, from freshwater fisheries in Scotland, Germany and France but quantities were small and the trade networks local.³² Large quantities of high quality pearls with well-developed international trade networks were only found in the East, in the warm, clear waters of the Red Sea, the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.³³ Any of these three areas could have provided the hundreds of uniform pearls needed for the royal mantle.³⁴ Luckily we have a text that can help us discern their origin more precisely. The Muslim geographer Al Idrisi (d.1165) wrote his Geography at Roger's court in the early 1150s and it includes a detailed description of the pearl industry. Al Idrisi identifies the Persian Gulf as the centre of the industry and specifically names important fisheries between Oman and Bahrain: Sohar, Damar, Muscat, Al-Jabal and Julfar. He writes that,

“it is in the Persian Gulf that nearly all the pearl fisheries exist. Around 300 are frequented and renowned..... The fisheries of the Gulf are richer and more productive than those in the seas of India and Yemen; that is why we have digressed extensively on this subject.”³⁵

He also tells us that pearl fishing took place in August and September and that wealthy merchants came from all over the world to stay for the pearl fishing season.³⁶ Each merchant would hire a diver and assistant, then a group of merchants together would hire a boat. Bahrain's fleet of around two hundred pearling boats would go out to the oyster banks *en masse* daily during the season. The float was regulated by the Qays rulers of Bahrain and independent pearl fishing was prohibited. Upon returning to port, each merchant would

³⁰ Robert A. Carter, *Sea of Pearls: Seven Thousand Years of the Industry That Shaped the Gulf* (London: Arabian Publishing Ltd, 2012), 36–37; Avinoam Shalem, ‘Jewels and Journeys: The Case of the Medieval Gemstone Called Al-Yatima’, *Muqarnas* 14 (1997): 42–56.

³¹ Carter, *Sea of Pearls*, 41.

³² R. A. Donkin, *Beyond Price: Pearls and Pearl-Fishing: Origins to the Age of Discoveries* (American Philosophical Society, 1998), 254–55.

³³ Lenman, ‘The Gem Trade and Geographical Knowledge from Columbus to James I’, in *Renaissance Culture in Context: Theory and Practice*, ed. Jean R. Brink and William F. Gentrup (Taylor & Francis, 1993), 89.

³⁴ Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met*, 161, note 148.

³⁵ Al Idrisi, *Géographie d'Édrisi Traduite de l'Arabe En Français et Accompagnée de Notes*, ed. Pierre Amédée Émilien Probe Jaubert, vol. 1 (Paris: Société de Géographie, 1836), 377. “C’est dans le golfe Persique qu’existent presque toutes les pêcheries de perles. Il y en a environ trois cents qui sont fréquentées et renommées..... Les pêcheries de ce golfe sont plus riches et plus productives que celles des mers de l’Inde et de l’Éméen; c’est pourquoi nous nous sommes beaucoup étendu sur ce sujet.” Translated into English in Carter, *Sea of Pearls*, 45.

³⁶ Al Idrisi, *Géographie d'Édrisi Traduite de l'Arabe En Français et Accompagnée de Notes*, 1:373.

relinquish his pearls to the governor until market day, when they would be sorted according to size and value and returned to the merchant. Also on market day the merchant would be required to pay a heavy tax to the Qays.³⁷ Pearls fished off the coast of Bahrain and Oman were taken usually to Baghdad, Aleppo or markets in Persia and then on to Constantinople.³⁸ An alternative route took the pearls from both the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea, by boat to Egypt and on to the markets of Cairo.³⁹ Genoese merchants had a particularly close relationship with the Qays rulers of Bahrain. The Genoese took their pearls from the Gulf overland to Constantinople and then by boat to Genoa, almost certainly passing through the straits of Messina.⁴⁰ Indeed, by the fourteenth century Messina had its own pearl market, as did Naples, which must also have been on the Genoese pearl route.⁴¹

For the mantle, a vast quantity of pearls was required and they needed to be more or less uniform in terms of size and colour. Obtaining them would not have been simple or cheap. From al-Idrisi's description, it seems that Roger had two options: he may have directly employed a merchant or several merchants to spend the summer in Bahrain to obtain the pearls directly from the source. Alternatively, he may have sent merchants to one of the major Mediterranean pearl markets: either Cairo or Constantinople. The pearls may have come from a stockpile in Roger's treasury which had been built up over a long period of time. But, since this is the first pearl-encrusted garment made at Roger's court, the vast quantity of pearls may have been purchased especially for the mantle, which would have involved a year or so of planning and may have meant creating new commercial relationships and strengthening old ones.

The production and trade in pearls and silk in the twelfth century have two things in common: first, both industries were highly regulated and secondly, Jewish workers were central to both. In the second half of the twelfth century Benjamin of Tudela (d.1173) wrote

³⁷ Al Idrisi, *Géographie d'Édrisi Traduite de l'Arabe En Français et Accompagnée de Notes*; Carter, *Sea of Pearls*, 45–47.

³⁸ Carter, *Sea of Pearls*, 40; Nasir-i Khusraw, *Sefer Nameh : Relation Du Voyage de Nassiri Khosrau En Syrie, En Palestine, En Égypte, En Arabie et En Perse, Pendant Les Années de l'hégire 437-444 (1035-1042)*, ed. Charles Henri Auguste Schefer (Paris: E. Leroux, 1881), 227, 230.

³⁹ Anne Regourd, 'Trade on the Red Sea during the Ayyubid and Mamluk Periods. The Quseir Paper Manuscript Collection 1999-2003, First Data', *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 34 (2004): 277–92; Carter, *Sea of Pearls*, 56–57.

⁴⁰ Carter, *Sea of Pearls*, 54.

⁴¹ Donkin, *Beyond Price*, 254.

that the industry at Qatif, near Bahrain, was controlled by a Jewish official.⁴² Benjamin also tells us that the silk workers of Thebes were mostly Jews by the late twelfth century.⁴³ Throughout the Mediterranean, Jewish communities were often jewellers. In the seventeenth century the merchants and jewellers who worked in the pearl section of the Grand Bazaar in Constantinople were all Jews, a tradition which probably originated in the Middle Ages.⁴⁴ Fatimid court jewellers were all Jewish, as were many of the merchants in Cairo who imported pearls, showing that the pearl trade was part of international Jewish trade networks.⁴⁵ There is no evidence that Jewish merchants were involved in creating the Sicilian mantle, but we can speculate that perhaps Roger made use of Sicilian Jewish merchants and their wide-reaching networks in order to acquire them.

Gold thread embroidery

At the time the mantle was made in the early 1130s, Sicily probably produced only low quality woven fabrics. In 1147, approximately fifteen years after the creation of the mantle, during a military campaign against the Byzantine Emperor, Roger II invaded Thebes and abducted silk workers.⁴⁶ They were mainly weavers, who were probably skilled in producing highly sought-after figurative silks.⁴⁷ The best known examples of this type are the so-called Byzantine ‘lion silks’, produced in the imperial workshops in Constantinople, featuring strident lions woven into a scarlet background. Roger II’s aim in bringing the weavers to Sicily was for them to train Sicilian textile workers – and indeed, after 1147, Sicily did produce high-quality, figurative woven textiles very similar to the Byzantine lion silks.⁴⁸ But at the time the mantle was made in the 1130s, Roger II did not have access to the technology or artists necessary to create his own ‘lion silk’. The closest he could get was to reproduce similar designs in embroidery.

⁴² Benjamin, *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, ed. Adolf Asher (London; Berlin: A. Asher & Co., 1840), 137.

⁴³ Jacoby, ‘Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction’, 225; David Jacoby, ‘The Jews and the Silk Industry of Constantinople’, in *Latin Romania and the Mediterranean* (Aldershot: Routledge, 2001), 1–20.

⁴⁴ Donkin, *Beyond Price*, 250.

⁴⁵ Donkin, 136–37; Shelomo Dov Goitein and Mordechai Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza ‘India Book’* (Brill, 2008), 550.

⁴⁶ Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, 84.

⁴⁷ Janet Snyder, ‘Cloth from the Promised Land: Appropriated Islamic Tiraz in Twelfth-Century French Sculpture’, in *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings*, ed. E. Jane Burns (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 157–58; Jacoby, ‘Silk in Western Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade’, 462–66.

⁴⁸ Anna Muthesius, *Byzantine Silk Weaving: AD 400 to AD 1200* (Vienna: Verlag Fassbaender, 1997), 34, 44 & 112–16.

Although to a modern eye, gold thread embroidery may seem more impressive than a woven figurative textile, the latter required more resources than the former. Although the materials are expensive, gold thread embroidery on silk is a simple technique which can be easily carried out by individuals and small workshops.⁴⁹ Weaving figurative silks is a sophisticated technique, which requires expensive, complex machinery and investment in training a large workshop of weavers. Economic decline in Byzantium was accompanied by a decline in silk weaving: in the late twelfth century, a time of economic depression, Byzantine figurative weaving diminished because of economic decline, and was largely replaced by embroidery.⁵⁰ Roger II's decision to create an embroidered mantle in the 1130s could have been a foreshadowing his invasion of Thebes in the 1140s. It shows perhaps Roger's desire to create silk garment similar to those worn at the Byzantine court. Is the mantle Roger's first attempt to create an imitation of a Byzantine lion silk?

The thread used in the embroidery can also be linked to Byzantium. The thread was made by wrapping extremely thin strips of metal around a core of yellow silk thread.⁵¹ The gold content on the mantle is very high in comparison to other examples. Márta Járó's analysis shows that it is 96% gold and 4% silver, which is significantly higher than gold threads from other Sicilian textiles, such as the mantle's lining and the garments which were added to the royal regalia by Roger II's descendants.⁵² In the case of the later garments, Járó is convinced that the gold thread was made in Sicily, because of their lower gold content. But the origin of the mantle's thread is uncertain. The closest parallel, in terms of gold content and production technique, is the coronation mantle of the Kings of Hungary, which was made about a hundred years earlier.⁵³ It is unlikely that there were direct links between Sicily and Hungary, so the most likely scenario is that both kings acquired the gold thread from a common source: probably a Byzantine source, most likely from a gold thread workshop in Constantinople (given that the capital was a hub, which could be reached by merchants from both Sicily and

⁴⁹ Warren T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon: Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), xxv–xxvi.

⁵⁰ Woodfin, xxv–xxvi.

⁵¹ Márta Járó, 'Indagine Sui Filati Metallici', in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane e Trame Di Seta Dal Palazzo Reale Di Palermo*, vol. 1, 2 vols (Catania: G. Maimone, 2006), 96–100; Lisa Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters: Silk Fabrics in Italian and Northern Paintings 1300-1550*, 1st edition (New Haven Connecticut; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 7–8.

⁵² Járó, 'Indagine Sui Filati Metallici'.

⁵³ Elizabeth Coatsworth and Gale Owen-Crocker, 'The Coronation Mantle of King Stephen of Hungary', in *Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from Early Medieval to Early Modern Western Europe* (Brill, 2018), 81–83.

Hungary).⁵⁴ In this scenario, the gold thread would have been imported to Sicily pre-made and ready to be embroidered. It is unlikely that Roger brought Byzantine workers to Sicily to make the thread. Since gold thread is so easy to transport it would have been easier to buy the thread in Constantinople).

Focusing on the materials used in the mantle and the journeys they took to reach Sicily means shifting attention away from the Arab facet of the garment and towards Byzantium. When we think about the expense, effort and the commercial and diplomatic networks necessary to acquire the materials, we can better understand how a medieval audience would have perceived the garment: the original audience would have known what it took to collate the materials and would have been impressed. The mantle was not only a display of economic strength but also of the geographic reach of the kingdom's merchants and the fact that the king protected the merchants and fostered the trade networks. The iconography of the lions trampling camels would have, no doubt, been interesting and meaningful but quite possibly secondary to both the visual impact of the materials, and the fact that the garment looked similar to those worn at the Byzantine court. In order to understand how the materials contributed to the meaning of the mantle, we need to think about when and where it was worn and how it functioned in a ceremonial context.

Part Two: Function

Historians have long been puzzled by the function of the mantle. It has sometimes been called a coronation mantle, but it was made several years after Roger's coronation in 1130. Such an opulent garment would logically have been made for a specific ceremonial function but so far no ceremonial function has been proposed. Rotraud Bauer has written that there were no important ceremonies in Roger's court at that time and deduced that the mantle was made for aesthetic reasons, for the pleasure Roger took in the imagery.⁵⁵ In fact, if we look at Roger's life in the early 1130s, we can see that he planned and executed a series of important ceremonies involving his sons. In order to explore this, we need to look carefully at the circumstances of Roger's early reign.

⁵⁴ Márta Járó, 'Filati D'Oro: Tecniche e Metologie', in *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, Filigrane e Trame Di Seta Dal Palazzo Reale Di Palermo*, vol. 2 (Catania: G. Maimone, 2006), 164.

⁵⁵ Rotraud Bauer, 'Manto di Ruggero II', in *Nobiles officinae. Perle, Filigrane e Trame di Seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo. Catalogo della Mostra di Palermo*, ed. Maria Andalaro, vol. 1 (Catania: Giuseppe Maimone Editore, 2006), 46.

Roger II's early reign and succession

Roger II succeeded his father, Roger I of Hauteville, as count of Sicily in 1105, as a vassal of his cousin, the Duke of Apulia. In 1127, when William Duke of Apulia died, Roger was the obvious candidate to succeed him, but he faced opposition from the Prince of Capua and other nobles on the south Italian mainland who were opposed to the hegemony of Hauteville power.⁵⁶ Roger II was eventually invested as duke by Pope Honorius II (d.1130) in August of 1128 but his rule on the mainland remained shaky.⁵⁷ Part of his strategy for consolidating his authority was to establish his sons as heirs and successors, thus creating the impression of a stable and entrenched dynasty. Roger and his wife, Elvira of Castile (m.1117, d.1135), had four sons: Roger III (d.1149), Tancred (d. late 1130s or early 1140s), Alfonso (d.1144) and William, who was to become King William I (b.1120, r.1154 – 1166).⁵⁸ The oldest sons had not yet reached adolescence when their father inherited the mainland, but as early as 1128, Roger had his sons explicitly included in a Treaty agreement with the northern Italian city of Savona, in which both parties agreed a strategy to reduce piracy.⁵⁹ Furthermore, in 1129, in a ceremony in Melfi cathedral, Roger gathered his nobles to swear an oath of loyalty, not only to him but also to his older sons, Roger and Tancred.⁶⁰

When Roger became king, once again, succession was important: In 1130, the papal schism between Innocent II and the anti-Pope, Anacletus II (d.1138), and the latter's reliance on support from Roger and the southern Italian cardinals, enabled Roger to demand that Anacletus make him a king. Anacletus duly issued a document stating that,

“We concede, grant and authorise to you, your son Roger, and your other sons following you in the kingdom as you shall decree, and to your heirs, the crown of the kingdom of Sicily, and Calabria, Apulia and all those

⁵⁶ Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, 45–47.

⁵⁷ Houben, 41–73.

⁵⁸ Houben, 35–36.

⁵⁹ G. Filippi, ‘Patto Di Pace Tra Ruggiero II Normanno e La Città Di Savona’, *Archivio Storico per Le Province Napoletane* 14 (1889): 750–57; Evelyn Jamison, ‘The Norman Administration of Apulia and Capua: More Especially under Roger II. and William I. 1127-1166’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 6, no. 6 (1913): 273–74; Helene Wieruszowski, *Politics and Culture in Medieval Spain and Italy* (Rome: Ed. di Storia e Letteratura, 1971), 25.

⁶⁰ Romauld of Salerno, ‘Chronicon’, in *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, ed. Graham Loud (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2012), 254, note 8; Jamison, ‘The Norman Administration of Apulia and Capua: More Especially under Roger II. and William I. 1127-1166’, 274; Pasquale Corsi, ‘Le Celebrazioni Laiche’, in *Strumenti, Tempi e Luoghi Di Comunicazione Nel Mezzogiorno Normanno-Svevo: Atti Delle Undecime Giornate Normanno-Sveve, Bari, 26-29 Ottobre 1993*, ed. Giosuè Musca and Vito Sivo (Bari: Dedalo, 1995), 200.

lands which we and our predecessors have granted to your predecessors,
the dukes of Apulia, namely Robert Guiscard and his son Roger.”⁶¹

It is significant that the document issued by Anacletus places Roger in a genealogy, emphasising the authority of the first Norman Duke of Apulia, Roger II's uncle, Robert Guiscard (d.1085), and Guiscard's son, Roger Borsa (r. 1085 – 1111), but also firmly establishing that the crown was granted not only to Roger II but also to his sons, especially Roger III who is mentioned by name.

After the coronation, the new king faced further rebellions on the mainland. In the early years of his reign, Roger spent winters in the safety of Palermo and summers on military campaigns on the mainland. By the autumn of 1133 most of Apulia was under his control.⁶² Roger finished his summer campaigns with visits to Gravina di Puglia in September and to Salerno in October, before returning to Sicily for the winter.⁶³ He returned to the mainland the following spring, docking at Salerno in May.⁶⁴ The inscription on the mantle tells us that the garment was made in the Islamic year 528. Converting dates in the lunar Islamic calendar to the solar Western calendar is not an exact science.⁶⁵ However, the year 528 can be estimated as beginning in November of 1133 and ending in October of 1134, in the Julian calendar.⁶⁶ This was a significant year for Roger's sons, who were nearing adulthood. Roger III was fifteen in 1133. The typical age for Norman nobles to be knighted was from sixteen to eighteen, for example King Henry II of England was knighted at sixteen.⁶⁷ Roger II became a knight and began his independent rule (ending the regency of his mother) in 1112 when he

⁶¹ Graham Loud, ed., ‘Anacletus II's Privilege to Roger II, Authorising the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily, 27th September 1130’, in *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2012), 304–5; József Deér, ed., *Das Papsttum Und Die Süditalienischen Normannenstaaten. 1053-1212* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1969), 62–64.

⁶² Telese, *Alexandri Telesini Abbatis Ystoria Rogerii Regis Sicilie, Calabrie Atque Apulie*.

⁶³ Carlrichard Brühl, ed., *Rogerii II. Regis Diplomata Latina* (Köln: Böhlau, 1987), 88–91, nos. 30–32; Telese, *Alexandri Telesini Abbatis Ystoria Rogerii Regis Sicilie, Calabrie Atque Apulie*, Book II, chapter 53; Graham A. Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, UK ed. edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 97.

⁶⁴ Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, 97, note 105; Telese, *Alexandri Telesini Abbatis Ystoria Rogerii Regis Sicilie, Calabrie Atque Apulie*, book II, chapter 54.

⁶⁵ Richard Blackburn, ‘Review of Freeman-Grenville G. S. P., The Islamic and Christian Calendars AD 622–2222 (AH 1–1650) (Reading, U.K.: Garnet Publishing, 1995)’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 4 (November 1998): 576; Eric Hanne, ‘Dates and Calendars’, in *Medieval Islamic Civilization*, ed. Josef W. Meri and Jere L. Bacharach, vol. 1 (Oxford, New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 195–96.

⁶⁶ Zurich University Institute for Oriental Studies, ‘Islamic Calendar’, accessed 24 October 2017, <http://www.oriold.uzh.ch/static/hegira.html>.

⁶⁷ Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings: 1075-1225* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); William M. Aird, *Robert 'Curthose', Duke of Normandy (C. 1050-1134)* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), 57–58; Seán Duffy, ‘Henry II and England's Insular Neighbours’, in *Henry II: New Interpretations*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill and Nicholas Vincent (Boydell Press, 2007), 130.

was sixteen, and this seems to have been in line with practice in Normandy and Anglo-Norman England (for example Henry II of England was knighted at sixteen).⁶⁸ Although dubbing was later to become a more elaborate and codified ritual, at this point in the twelfth century it was still a simple and pragmatic event that marked a man's entry into adulthood and his military proficiency. It involved the giving and blessing of a set of arms and armour and usually coincided with a young man's first military campaign.⁶⁹ Becoming a knight meant taking up both inheritance and arms, accepting the responsibility to fight, and also signified a symbolic coming of age. Roger III, Tancred and Alfonso would be expecting to be knighted from 1134 onwards. Indeed, Roger III and Tancred were knighted together, on Christmas Day in 1135, along with forty other young nobles.⁷⁰ It would have been an important step in establishing their capacity to fight alongside their father. But they would have been relatively anonymous amongst the other young men. Far more significant were the investiture ceremonies, in which Roger conveyed important titles and lands upon his sons.

Before they became knights, Roger III and Tancred had already been given important titles. In his perfunctory description of their dubbing, Alexander Telese (d.1143) refers to the king's sons as, "Duke Roger and Tancred, Prince of Bari".⁷¹ This means that, at some point before Christmas of 1135, King Roger had made Roger III Duke of Apulia and Tancred Prince of Bari. Duke of Apulia in particular is a key strategic title, since it was held by Robert Guiscard and by Roger II himself before his coronation. The title 'Prince of Bari' was also significant and strategic: Bari had been the capital of the Byzantine territories in Italy before the Norman conquest and, had been rebellious in the 1120s and in the early years of Roger II's reign.⁷² Since both sons were still certainly under sixteen until 1134 and the mainland part of Roger's kingdom was so unstable before the autumn of 1133, these investitures almost certainly happened in 1134 or 1135, at the same time the mantle was made. We have no further

⁶⁸ Brühl, *Rogarii II. Regis Diplomata Latina*, 7–9, no.3; Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, 30–31; Hiroshi Takayama, *The Administration of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 47; Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*; Aird, *Robert 'Curthose', Duke of Normandy (C. 1050–1134)*, 57–58; Duffy, 'Henry II and England's Insular Neighbours', 130.

⁶⁹ Jonathan Boulton, 'Classic Kighthood as Nobiliary Dignity: The Knighting of Counts and Kings' Sons in England, 1066–1272', in *Medieval Knighthood V: Papers from the Sixth Strawberry Hill Conference, 1994* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), 53–54, 78 and 80.

⁷⁰ Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, 121; Telese, *Alexandri Telesini Abbatis Ystoria Rogarii Regis Sicilie, Calabrie Atque Apulie*, Book 4.

⁷¹ Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, 121; Telese, *Alexandri Telesini Abbatis Ystoria Rogarii Regis Sicilie, Calabrie Atque Apulie*, Book 4.

⁷² Paul Oldfield, *City and Community in Norman Italy*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 72 (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), chapter 2.

information about the conferral of these titles to Roger III and Tancred but the investiture of their younger brother Alfonso provides us with a much clearer picture.

Roger II invested his third son Alfonso as Prince of Capua. This was also a strategic title since Roger II's authority in Capua was contested. Following the Norman conquest in the eleventh century, Capua had become an independent principality, ruled by the Drengot family. When Roger II became Duke in 1127 the Princes of Capua allied themselves with Pope Honorius II in opposing Roger.⁷³ As part of Roger's agreement with the anti-Pope Anacletus II in 1130, Anacletus decreed that the Principality of Capua should come under Roger's authority whilst remaining separate from the new kingdom. Despite the papal decree, the Princes of Capua resisted this attempt to subjugate their authority and remained actively rebellious throughout the early 1130s.⁷⁴ It was only in the summer of 1135 that Roger definitively managed to oust Prince Robert II of Capua and remove his dynasty from power.⁷⁵ In doing so, Roger created a power vacuum, which needed to be filled so that he could assert his authority over the principality.⁷⁶ At the end of the summer, before he returned to Sicily for the winter, he invested his third son Alfonso as Prince of Capua. Alexander Telese us some detail about the investiture: King Roger was staying in the nearby town of Guardia. He summoned some of the Capuan clergy to Guardia so that he could appoint an outsider, William of Ravenna, as Archbishop and Royal Justiciar (the latter title allowed William to rule Capua in Roger and Alfonso's absence).⁷⁷ Having done so, Roger and Alfonso returned with the clergy to Capua. When they arrived the clergy and the people processed out of the town to meet them. The royal procession made their way into Capua, first the new archbishop and then the new Prince Alfonso. Once the procession had reached the centre of the city, a ceremony was held in which all the barons of the new principality paid homage to Prince Alfonso and swore an oath to be loyal to him. Alexander Telese emphasises that their loyalty to Alfonso was to be secondary to their loyalty to King Roger and his eldest son and appointed successor, Roger III.⁷⁸ This ceremony probably took place in Capua cathedral. This ceremony and double appointment was followed by what has been described by Graham

⁷³ G. A. Loud, *Church and Society in the Norman Principality of Capua, 1058-1197* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 142.

⁷⁴ Loud, 144–45, 163–70; Takayama, *The Administration of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, 62.

⁷⁵ Takayama, *The Administration of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, 62.

⁷⁶ Jamison, 'The Norman Administration of Apulia and Capua: More Especially under Roger II. and William I. 1127-1166', 249.

⁷⁷ G. A. Loud, *The Latin Church in Norman Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 271–72.

⁷⁸ Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, 116; Telese, *Alexandri Telesini Abbatis Ystoria Rogerii Regis Sicilie, Calabrie Atque Apulie*, Book 3, chapter 31.

Loud as “a vigorous propaganda campaign to justify the new state of affairs”, which included the minting of new coins with Alfonso on the obverse and the city of Capua on the reverse.⁷⁹ There is no record of the investitures of Roger III and Tancred but they must have taken place either the same summer or the summer before, most likely in Bari, which was the most important city in Apulia and the former Byzantine capital, or possibly in Melfi, the Norman’s first capital in Italy.

Investiture ceremonies and clothing

These investiture ceremonies and the stabilisation of the mainland seem to have been Roger’s main concerns in the early 1130s at the time the mantle was created. Could the mantle have been made for these ceremonies? In order to hypothesise about this, we can look at how clothing was used in similar ceremonies elsewhere. One of the contemporary investitures we know most about is that of the Dukes of Aquitaine. In 1172, Richard the Lionheart (r.1189 - 1199) was invested as Duke of Aquitaine. His investiture had two parts: at the Abbey of St Hillaire in Poitiers there was an investiture ceremony in which Richard was given a lance and a banner by the Bishops of Poitiers and Bordeaux then there was a journey to Limoges, where the new Duke participated in a procession through the city, was given the ring of the local martyr St Valerie and accepted an oath of loyalty from his people. This mirrors quite closely Alexander Telese’s account of Alfonso’s investiture in 1135, which took place at two locations, beginning in Guardia where the archbishop was present and continuing with a procession into the city of Capua and an oath of loyalty.⁸⁰ A thirteenth-century commentary on the coronation *ordo* of the dukes of Aquitaine states that, during the investiture, in emulation of the rituals of the Holy Roman Empire, the dukes were given a silk mantle and a small crown.⁸¹

From this it seems very plausible that the investiture ceremonies of Roger’s sons could have included some kind of ritual robing. The investitures of the three sons made them vassals of their father and Alexander Telese’s description of the ceremonies in Capua make it clear that Alfonso was not to rule Capua independently, as the previous princes had done, but was

⁷⁹ Loud, *Church and Society in the Norman Principality of Capua, 1058-1197*, 164–65.

⁸⁰ D. Callahan, ‘Eleanor of Aquitaine, the Coronation Rite of the Dukes of Aquitaine and the Cult of St Martial of Limoges’, in *The World of Eleanor of Aquitaine*, ed. Marcus Bull and Léglu (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 29–31.

⁸¹ Percy Ernst Schramm, *A History of the English Coronation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), 48–49; Callahan, ‘Eleanor of Aquitaine, the Coronation Rite of the Dukes of Aquitaine and the Cult of St Martial of Limoges’, 29–30.

subject to the authority of his father and his older brother. It is likely therefore that at some point in the investiture ceremonies the sons would have paid homage to their father. The *Speculum Juris*, written in the thirteenth century by William Durandus (d.1296) tells us what was involved in paying homage: the person paying homage would kneel and place his hands between his lord's hands and then offer a kiss of peace.⁸² If the son was wearing the mantle, this choreography would have shown off the mantle in all its glory. As the son knelt in front of his father, the mantle would have fanned out on the floor and its opulent design and craftsmanship would have been visible to the audience of barons and clergy in attendance. The procession through the city would also have shown off the mantle to an even wider audience. The prince would possibly have been on horseback during the procession which, again, would have allowed the mantle to fan out and be seen in optimal conditions. This would have increased the visibility of the iconography, the inscription and the materials.

So far we have looked at Western ceremonies but Byzantine ceremonies may be still more relevant. The ritualised giving and receiving of silks and robes as a way of sealing contracts and conferring status was particularly entrenched and sophisticated at the Byzantine court.⁸³ The Sicilian mantle is similar to a *chlamys*, which, in the Byzantine classification of regalia, is a semi-circular cloak, which was fastened at the right shoulder and worn by the emperor, empress and male dignitaries of the court.⁸⁴ In the Byzantine court the garment usually had *tablion*, two decorative rectangles on the straight edges, at elbow height, but it seems that this was not a consistent feature.⁸⁵ When worn by the emperor at court and when he performed investitures, it signified his secular role as head of the imperial administration. The garment played an important role in the coronation ceremony: the emperor's *chlamys* was placed on the altar of Hagia Sofia and a prayer was said over it.⁸⁶ The imperial *chlamys* could be adorned with pearls and gemstones, in a similar manner to the Sicilian mantle. For example, the *chlamys* of Romanos III (r.1128 – 1134) was studded with pearls, gold crosses and

⁸² Jacques Le Goff, 'The Symbolic Ritual of Vassalage', in *Time, Work & Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jacques Le Goff and Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 239.

⁸³ Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 43–45; Anna Muthesius, 'The Role of Byzantine Silks in the Ottonian Empire', in *Byzanz Und Das Abenland Im 10 Und 11 Jahrhundert*, ed. Evangelos Constantinou (Cologne: Böhlau, 1997), 301–17; Anna Muthesius, *Studies in Byzantine, Islamic and Near Eastern Silk Weaving* (London: Pindar Press, 2008).

⁸⁴ Maria G. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images: Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography 11th-15th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 12–13; J. Ball, *Byzantine Dress* (Basingstoke, New York: Springer, 2005), 32–34.

⁸⁵ Elisabeth Piltz, 'Middle Byzantine Court Costume', in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Dumbarton Oaks: Harvard University Press, 1995), 49.

⁸⁶ Muthesius, *Studies in Byzantine, Islamic and Near Eastern Silk Weaving*, 67.

rubies.⁸⁷ The *chlamys* was worn in contrast to the *loros* costume, which had a religious significance, symbolising the emperor's divinely ordained status and was worn only on feast days – the *Book of Ceremonies* mentions it being worn only at Easter and Pentecost.⁸⁸ Roger II is seen wearing the *loros* costume in the Martorana church in Palermo, in the mosaic in which he is crowned by Christ, in keeping with the Byzantine understanding of the *loros* as demonstrating divinely-ordained rulership. This demonstrates that Roger (or more likely his Emir, George of Antioch) had an understanding of Byzantine court dress and was keen to emulate it.

Furthermore, the Sicilian mantle may have had a more specific meaning that evoked the Byzantine court ceremonial. *The Book of Ceremonies* describes how, when a courtier was elevated to the rank of *nobilissimus*, he received a *chlamys*.⁸⁹ *Nobilissimus* was the highest rank that could be held by someone who was not a member of the imperial family.⁹⁰ The *chlamys* is described first as green with gold roses but later as scarlet, with the further clarification that it was not purple like the *chlamys* of higher ranks.⁹¹ Albert Vogt has suggested that it may have been both green and scarlet while Eileen Rubery posits that the writer of the *Book of Ceremonies* may have mixed up the green *chlamys* with the scarlet *divitision*, which was worn beneath it, but both agree that the most important point about the colour of the garment was that it was not purple, thus distinguishing it from the higher rank of emperor.⁹² Several scholars have noted that, for Byzantine viewers, hue was less important than qualities like brightness and lustre, and it is possible that a bright colour like green might be used as a way to describe gleaming gold decoration on a garment.⁹³ Therefore it is possible – although by no means certain - that the *Book of Ceremonies* was actually describing a *chlamys* which was scarlet and gold, like the Sicilian mantle. The Sicilian mantle

⁸⁷ Marius Canard, 'Les Sources Arabes de l'histoire Byzantine Aux Confins Des Xe et XIe Siècles', *Revue Des Études Byzantines* 19 (1961): 291.

⁸⁸ Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images*, 16 and 18–24; Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 137.

⁸⁹ Piltz, 'Middle Byzantine Court Costume', 42.

⁹⁰ Graham Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard: Southern Italy and the Northern Conquest* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000).

⁹¹ Albert Vogt, ed., *Le Livre des cérémonies ... Texte établi et traduit par Albert Vogt. [With a commentary and plans.] Gr. & Fr.*, [Collection byzantine.] (Paris: Paris, 1935), Book II, Texte 33–6.

⁹² Albert Vogt, 33–36; Eileen Rubery, 'The Vienna "Empress" Ivory and Its Companion in Florence: Crowned in Different Glories?', in *Wonderful Things: Byzantium Through Its Art*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Liz James (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 105, note 23.

⁹³ Rubery, 'The Vienna "Empress" Ivory and Its Companion in Florence: Crowned in Different Glories?', 105–6; Pentcheva, 'Epigrams on Icons', in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Liz James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 128–29; Liz James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 74.

is dyed with kermes, which was the dye most commonly used to achieve red in Byzantine workshops.⁹⁴

The title of *nobilissimus* was meaningful on the southern Italian mainland because it was a title held by Robert Guiscard.⁹⁵ In the early 1070s, soon after Guiscard took control of the city of Bari, which had been the Byzantine provincial capital, he began negotiating a marriage alliance with the emperor. Guiscard's daughter Olympias was engaged to Constantine Doukas (r.1059 – 1067), the son of Michael VII Doukas (r.1071 – 1078). As part of the marriage negotiations, Guiscard was awarded the title *nobilissimus*, which was added to his seal.⁹⁶ Through the Byzantine title, he gained the impression of legitimacy to rule over the former Byzantine territories. Guiscard was also Duke of Apulia, a title which passed on to Roger II and then to Roger III. It could be that the title *nobilissimus* was also passed on and that it remained connected to the duchy of Apulia. Perhaps the Sicilian royal mantle was made as a scarlet chlamys principally for the investiture of Roger III as both Duke of Apulia and *nobilissimus*.

Conclusion

The mantle is usually analysed within the context of Roger II's court in Palermo, and often more specifically as belonging in the Cappella Palatina. But the portability of a textile means that we should bear in mind that the king could have taken it with him on his travels across his kingdom and that, in the 1130s, Roger's focus was on stabilising the mainland and establishing the succession of his sons. The mantle would not have been easy to transport: it weighs 50kg and would have been difficult to fold (presumably it was transported in a garment case, similar to the York Minster cope chest).⁹⁷ But transportation would have been possible, and the difficulty of transporting it may even have added to the impressive impact it had on mainland audiences. When we look at the mantle through lense of materials and function it has a strong relationship to the Byzantine world. As a whole, it is evocative of an imperial Byzantine Chlamys, decorated with pearls and gems like Byzantine regalia,

⁹⁴ Muthesius, *Byzantine Silk Weaving*, 28.

⁹⁵ Alexēs G. K. Savvidēs, *Byzantino-Normannica: The Norman Capture of Italy (to A.D. 1081) and the First Two Invasions in Byzantium (A.D. 1081-1085 and 1107-1108)* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 2007), 38–39; Richard Upsher Smith, 'Nobilissimus and Warleader: The Opportunity and the Necessity behind Robert Guiscard's Balkan Expeditions', *Byzantion* 70 (2001): 507–26.

⁹⁶ Savvidēs, *Byzantino-Normannica*, 37–40; Upsher Smith, 'Nobilissimus and Warleader: The Opportunity and the Necessity behind Robert Guiscard's Balkan Expeditions', 512–13.

⁹⁷ Cecil Hewett, 'English Medieval Cope Chests', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 141, no. 1 (1988): 105–23, <https://doi.org/10.1179/jba.1988.141.1.105>.

depicting lions like prestigious Byzantine woven silks. My emphasis on the Byzantine aspects of the mantle does not detract from the Arabic emphasis in other studies. In fact, Isabelle Dolezalek's insight into the inscription and lining as legitimising evocations of continuity from pre-Norman Sicily fits well with the idea that the ceremonial function of the mantle was to strengthen and legitimise Norman rule by firming up the line of succession. Returning to Ganz's concept of a performative context for textiles, how would an audience on mainland southern Italy in the mid-1130s have perceived and understood the mantle? The high quality and expense of the materials would have stood out to them. The maritime urban centres, such as Bari, Amalfi and Salerno (the latter two very close to Capua), relied on pan Mediterranean trade for their economic success. In the silk, gold and pearls the audience would have seen, not just beauty and wealth, but also they would have seen the king's engagement with trade networks and the diplomacy required to sustain and grow them. Perhaps the mantle demonstrated to the kingdom at large that the king was fostering diplomatic and mercantile relationships. The acquisition of the materials and the production techniques would have been as, if not more meaningful as the iconography and inscription.

Figure 1: Mantle of Roger II, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

